

# Once Were Men

## Masculinities among young men in the Faroe Islands

*Einaferð vóru menn*

*Manslyndið hjá ungum monnum í Føroyum*

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### Úrtak

Hendan greinin lýsir fyra høvuðsbólkar av monnum í Føroyum eftir manslyndi teirra og sambandinum millum mansfyrmyndir og (lut)mentanarligan kapital. Við at nýta egið tilfar frá kanningararbeiði (2003-04), umframt leysar lýsingar av ungum monnum úr miðlunum, er ætlan mín at kanna sereyðkennini í stílnum og samleikunum hjá føroyskum dreingjum viðvíkjandi ‘maskulinitetum’. Seinastu árin er áhugin fyri at granska menn, mentan teirra og (nýggjar) maskulinitetir vaksin nógv, og er hetta ein endurspeglung av broytingunum í kynskjakinum, eintáttaðu lýsingunum av kynsmunum og fatan samfelagsins av monnum og kvinnum, dreingjum og gentum. Greinin gevur eitt íkast til ástøðilig kjak og hugsanir um hvøtjir ‘røttu’ menninir eru: hvussu verða teir allýstir, váttaðir og hvør er samfelagsstøða teirra? Spurningurin hevur við sær fylgjandi: í hvønn mun stuðla ‘macho’ og ‘maskulin’ virði mentanarliga kapital ungdómsins?

### Abstract

This article presents four essential categories of young men in the Faroe Islands emphasizing types of masculinity and the relation between male ideals and (sub)cultural capital. Using data from own fieldwork (2003-04) as well as popular media portrayals of young men I intend to trace major characteristics regarding styles

and identities of Faroese men in relation to ‘masculinities’. During the last years the interest in research on men, their culture and (new) masculinities has increased steadily, reflecting changes in gender discourses, gender stereotypes and society’s representation of men and women, boys and girls. This paper contributes to theoretical debates and reflections on who the ‘real’ men are: how are they defined, recognized and socially positioned? This questions leads to the following: in what degree do ‘macho’ and ‘masculine’ values contribute to young men’s cultural capital?

### Introduction

*Maður* is the Faroese term for man, and ‘ein rættur maður’ is a ‘real man’ – a common way of defining men and masculinities. Masculinity has to do with ‘manliness’, the characteristics of an adult male, while ‘machismo’ is the strong (or exaggerated) “sense of masculinity stressing attributes such as physical courage, virility, domination of women, and aggressiveness” (Farlex, 2005). Being virile, energetic, and ‘untamed’ by culture are essential traits of some

stereotypes of modern masculinity, but the fragmented world of our times displays many contesting styles and types of masculinity, depending on the men's social, cultural, ethnic or religious background, as well as their age group (Connell, 2005). Young men belong to different subcultures with varied presentations of gender differences, intergenerational communication, sexual identities, and manliness (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 2-26).

What is masculinity? The nearest that we get to an 'answer' is to state that masculinities are those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine (op. cit.)

Faroese society changed radically during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the last decades of the century, and is today regarded as a latemodern society, quite similar to other Nordic countries, even if the oceanic archipelago has kept crucial cultural bonds to its dim prehistory of maritime hunters (Gaini, 2006). Most young men still identify themselves with their ancestors, even if everyday life *anno* 2006 is very different from childhoods at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and earlier eras. It is common to describe latemodern reflexive society as a fragmented and individualized system. The shift to latemodern society is associated to the growing scope of communication and cooperation between countries and regions around the globe (e.g. Bauman, 1998; 2000; 2004; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990; 1991; 1998).

My hypothesis is therefore that young people are encouraged – even forced – to emancipate from static primordial family and local community identity bonds, hence also determined to form their own cultural identity out of personal preferences and strategies. In other words people do not merely *belong* to cultures anymore, they actively *choose* cultural affiliation. I argue that all existing masculinities in the Faroe Islands represent subcultural adaptations to contemporary society and that all masculinities in different ways have roots in a Faroese cultural heritage, even if the global influence, as we will see, is stronger among the urban youth than the Atlantic cowboys.

This article opens with a presentation of the past centuries' Faroese men emphasizing their working life and society's harsh natural environment.

Thereafter four categories of young men are portrayed: Atlantic cowboys, urban (European) youth, lonestars, and glocal pragmatics. The two main categories, the Atlantic cowboys and urban youth, represent masculinities in the dominant local and global youth cultures, while the two minor categories, lonestars and glocal pragmatics, either combine traits of the main masculinities or stay peripherally positioned outside mainstream culture. The categories are not *emic* but *etic*, as young Faroese men do not explicitly use the same concepts or definitions as I do, even if they indeed discuss the styles, values and symbols that are presented in this text. Investigating masculinities I delimit several types of Faroese men, all of them adaptations to latemodern society. Identity is never constructed a priori,

without any reference to social and cultural contexts, and the four groups in question represent different new steps forward in the North Atlantic maritime Europeans' walk through history (Andersen, 1979). Today young people have several competing representations and ideals of masculinity, all of them relating to 'non-masculine' and feminine identities as well as to the alternative masculinities.

In the end the differences and similarities among men and masculinities are discussed and analysed, leading to some concluding remarks on contemporary men's identities and cultural capital.

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### **Methodology**

A nationwide survey (2003) providing me with essential quantitative data on Faroese youth cultures and lifestyles serves as background material and framework for this text's composition and main questions. The survey in question was a part of my anthropological PhD project. The survey includes all students from 9<sup>th</sup> grade (14-15 years old) at all the lower secondary schools (compulsory) of the Faroe Islands. Around 700 valid questionnaires were received in my survey, carried out with the assistance of Mr P. Weihe, which is an impressive quantity in the Faroe Islands. Semi-structured interviews with pupils from 8<sup>th</sup> grade in two schools in Thorshavn (2003-4) have also

provided me with minor amounts of valuable information for the analysis of contemporary masculinities.

Faroese youth research is a relatively new topic with only a few projects in its repertoire, making it a puzzling task to portray young Faroese men of the past. The data material shaping this article is therefore a mix of fieldwork notes, observations, local media texts (from television, newspapers and the internet), and general reflections on the social and cultural make-up of the Faroe Islands *anno* 2006. My historical perspective draws from well-known historical and ethnographic documents from the Faroe Islands – scientific and popular books, articles, essays, songs, ballads and other sources.

This text is discussing selected parts of the data from my PhD research, but is also a portrait of my personal reflections on certain societal issues characterizing Faroese society today. The empirical material openly presented in my text is very limited, too light to justify all my general points, and I consider the text to be a qualified starting-point for future in-depth research on young men's identities and cultural capital in the Faroe Islands. It raises more questions than it presents answers. I try out some basic theories by deduction, hoping to contribute to the understanding of the relation between late-modern society and masculine identities in the Faroe Islands.

### **Premodern society**

Faroe Islanders were usually described as fishermen and sailors, sometime farmers, even whalers, but almost never as modern

individual citizens (e.g. Debes, 1990; 2001; Joensen, 1975; 1985; 1987). Most of the literature on the Faroe Islands focused attention on times past, ancient society, in the search of a lost European cultural heritage. In the spotlight there were dead (or at least almost vanished) customs and traditions, the ‘nature’ of the local language and culture, and the glorious modernization and industrialization of the fishing industry. The ancestors were the informants, past centuries the field, and the surrounding ocean the frame. Cultures as islands, the classic anthropological metaphor, is here to be taken literally. The cultural universe stretched to all physical and ideational parts of the archipelago, far from the European continent, and was in perfect symbiosis with the unfriendly oceanic nature.

The Faroese national identity [end of 19th century, FG] took shape in the midst of the transition to deep-sea, or smack, fishing. The Faroes were still a village society and most people still had their place within traditional Faroese industry, although it was diminishing in importance. This is one of the reasons that features of the peasant farmer culture could be encapsulated within the growing national culture. (Joensen, 1992: 156-157)

Faroese men climbed the mountains, fowled, caught bird eggs, whaled schools of pilot whales, cultivated small spots of arable land, raised sheep, and caught fish around the islands from small wooden boats (Joensen, 1987). The extreme climate, with gusts of wind and heavy rain, stormy waters and dense fog, made life in the Faroe Islands incredibly tough in the past. The weather’s unpredictability, showing all sea-

sons within the very same day, made non-flexible working or travelling plans completely unrealistic. The Faroe Islands were, an English author observed, “The Land of Maybe” (Norgate, 1943). The answer “maybe, depending on the weather...” is still very common. Faro Islanders are, says Norgate (1943: 3), “ruled under despotism – the not so benevolent despotism of the weather [...] Maybe we’ll go fishing tomorrow – maybe we’ll try and do a bit of haymaking – maybe we’ll get married”. Men had to row out on the open sea and take hazardous risks to catch fish in order to support their families and survive. Many boats never returned. The unforeseeable nature of things made every day a challenge, every venture a threat, and every wife and mother at home a nervous character. It was indeed a question of destiny as nobody could escape nor ignore the powers of nature. Deep honest respect of the sea and mountains was unquestionable as “only a fool does not fear the sea” (old proverb).

Physical strength, patience, endurance and sang froid were among the most important qualities of men in traditional society. The survivor was a harmonious character with indomitable energy. Never did men express strong feelings and sentiments explicitly in public (if not under the influence of alcohol). The Nordic coolness dominated the surface, hiding potential inner conflicts and desperation, and hence (hopefully) helping people not to give up the fight and to do the work that had to be done. There were only a few thousand Faroe Islanders for centuries and everybody depended on each other. The total population was only 5.000

year 1800, but tripled to 15.000 year 1900, a growth primarily related to the introduction of industrial fisheries in the end of the 19th century (Joensen, 1985). Many small villages were very isolated, surrounded by wild waters and dangerous mountain slopes, and almost self-sufficient in food and all necessities of life. Faroese society, says the American anthropologist Dennis Gaffin (1996: ix), illustrates “how Westerners can adapt to a difficult environment and integrate their culture with it”. Gaffin, a cultural ecologist, studied the link between physical and cultural space in the village Sumba. Faroese men and fathers of times past influence to some degree masculinities of today; men were characterized by strong emotional self-control, strong local (and kinship) sense of belonging and identity, as well as the indispensable mastering of (practical) skills related to all kinds of activities in daily life – on sea, in the mountains, at home, in the village – that according to Lévi-Strauss (1962) is part of the ‘concrete science’ of premodern people.

“Once were men, Faroese men, proud descendants of brave Norse Vikings”, old people may orate to their grand-sons and granddaughters nowadays, “who had everything they needed and lived happily under simple conditions”. There was no youth in our understanding of the concept as boys worked with their fathers, uncles and other men from the village already aged twelve or thirteen. Physical strength and maturity formed men. Boys and men were always involved in informal individual or group competition, but at the same time they worked collectively and depended heavily on strong alliances

and structured teamwork. Hence this competition never represented serious threats to the strong collective unity, as egocentrism and opportunism were heavily sanctioned by the surrounding community if they reached a critical level. Friendly competition was a game demonstrating qualities and skills, as men always wanted to test their strength, quickness, endurance, etcetera, like in play, but also their verbal sophistication, as storytelling and joking traditions are very strong in traditional Faroese culture. Verbal facility is highly valued (Gaffin, 1996). Making people laugh without provoking anyone personally and without boasting openly is an art that not everyone can claim to master.

Man was meant to be balanced, resist temptations and offences, still not accepting humiliating or insulting behaviour. He should not fight physically (except when boys fight for fun in play), never be aggressive and threatening, and never overreact shamefully and childishly when under any kind of psychological or physical pressure. This quite mild and soft character of men does not fit to modern stereotypes of hard-boiled macho fishermen (Minervudóttir, 2003). The ideal of stoic and calm men, seldom stressing over ‘trivial’ matters, details of daily life, belong to the ancient society of past centuries. Faroe Islanders were adapted to the brutal unfriendly nature, always confronting the storm and swimming against currents. Man was a hunter using his ‘untamed’ mind (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). What might seem contradictory at first glance is that Faroese men, according to some ethnographers, were soft and harmless, easy and

sensible, even feminine, without sexist stereotyped macho values, that are often associated to fishermen in other European regions (Minervudóttir, 2003). Self-obsessed people with swollen heads were undesirable and considered as a threat to the Faroese family and community. Society as a whole was indeed like a family; there was no place to hide from social control. Not even trees.

The high status of men mastering manifold practical skills and internalising concrete knowledge, learned by training and work with men in the community and matured through hard-gained experiences, made the ‘handyman’ and flexible winners of hunter society. The ‘book of life’ was more important for man than intellectual formal education with systematic abstract scientific knowledge accumulation. Man the hunter lived locally with the functional ‘concrete’ science as companion through the storms of life. Man was fisherman and farmer at the same time, without the cutting edges of the division of labour system of modern industrial states. The survivor, women and men, had to be highly independent and able to take care of most problems without help from professional specialists. The handyman is still a very important model for men and masculinities in the Faroe Islands. Faroese masculinities have been characterized by men who break borders and fix all kinds of practical problems by test and trial.

### **Atlantic cowboys**

‘Atlantic cowboys’, a notion borrowed from Johan von Bonsdorff’s entertaining Swedish book on the Faroe Islands entitled *Atlantens*

*cowboys* (1997), fits very well to the most powerful group of young men in the Faroe Islands. The maritime cowboys, a few thousand people, most of them living in villages and regional towns, have practised their peculiar masculine style for decades and it is only in the capital Torshavn (approximately 18.000 inhabitants) that the cowboys meet serious competition from urban youths and other smaller youth groups, even if they also hold a relatively strong influence on Torshavn’s youth.

Atlantic cowboys, considered parochial and ‘bygdasligir’ (derogatory remark on village people and lifestyles) by urban youths, are from families primarily engaged in the fisheries on land and offshore and belong to what reminds of a Faroese working-class. No typical industrial working-class exists in the Faroe Islands and many cowboys have large personal incomes acquired from skilled and manual work on industrial trawlers; even politicians and private company executives cannot match these impressive revenues. Faroese fish is like the gold of 19<sup>th</sup> century Klondyke (Alaska) making a few very rich while others don’t get anything out of it. Young Atlantic cowboys with fast money show high patterns of personal consumption; most of them don’t bother saving money for the future or making investments in shares or real property, because they prefer to use money immediately on cool cars, parties, booze, music, gifts, etcetera in order to impress friends and have fun. Atlantic cowboys are notorious action-seekers that like to show off their special variation of extravagance and machismo in weekends, holidays and any other free

time without strict obligations and duties. Many are part-time playboys with strong local community ties. Their behaviour, attitudes and language, unpolished and provocative, does not make them liberal and innovative, as the cowboys in general are considered conservative and under strong local pressure of conformity.

The atlantic cowboy's horse is the car. A desperate cowboy would give his 'kingdom' for a car, and the cult of cars, involving most young people on the islands, has definitely highest value and prestige among the cowboys (Gaini, 2004). The cowboy's car has manifold functions: it is used to cruise through dark streets by night, to participate in hazardous street races, to get intimate contact to girls, to meet friends, to organize mobile parties with drinking and heavy music (Best, 2006). The Faroese car-culture resembles the subcultures of car-loving youths in Nordic rural areas (Mogensen, 2002; Vaaranen, 2005). "Tied is man without a boat", says an old Faroese proverb, but today it seems much more appropriate to say: "tied is man without a car". Young people want cars, not boats, and the cowboys highly value driving (fast) skills, technical (engine) knowledge and skills, and the horsepower and style of their cars. The car symbolizes a home – an alternative private room out of parental reach – where young people spend a lot of time. The car functions as young people's private space and the heart of many peer social networks. "Immersed in car cultures", says Vaaranen (2005: 14) referring to Finnish men, "young men give in to an elementary desire in Finnish masculinity: the desire to control horsepower. The cul-

tural dream of mastering a machine can be found even in the ancient Finnish myths of Kalevala...". Atlantic cowboys feel free and liberated while driving, even if the islands are small and the road distances hence short, and invest much time and money in their cars. Many cowboys consider it more important to possess a car than an apartment. Horsepower is an indispensable cultural capital in Atlantic cowboy masculinity; even if many young sailors spend most of their time on sea the car has to be shining and ready for high-speed cruising when the cowboy steps on land with his pocket full of money. Atlantic cowboys are probably the best 'handymen' on the islands today, always ready to change wheels of the car, paint a house wall or fix the old engine of a small boat. The practical 'concrete science' of Lévi-Strauss (1962), mentioned earlier, learned by doing and participation, has much higher priority than formal academic skills among most cowboys and is indeed linked to their masculinity.

I have motomania – I only get peace  
in 5th gear  
when my shining steel rushes first into goal  
ah then life is good  
I have motomania – if I slide  
it doesn't matter  
if only I have my car  
then the world can be as it want

(from *Eg havi motomani*, Faroese song)

Atlantic cowboys, usually family-men even if their lifestyles at first glance may seem rebellious and temperamental, have relatively close and strong family bonds. They stay at their parents home as long as possible, not

finding it necessary to get their private house or apartment before marriage and children. Alone in the house, making dinner and washing clothes himself, is an unusual situation for a cowboy, and most likely, if the case, a desperate and completely unintended result of an unpredictable path of life. Most of their time is enjoyed together with family and a close group of friends from early childhood. The cowboys, even if they are some kind of action-seekers, favour stability and routine and avoid involvement in too many activities with strangers and foreigners. The same party with the same people is repeated week after week – and it is not considered as failure to actively reproduce this predictable leisure life cycle.

Weekend parties and drinking, essential activities in many young cowboys' lifestyle, is the main event gathering the friends and the topic discussed most intensely during the rest of the week. This reminds of the life of boys and men in Niemi's novel on a Northern Swedish rural community (Niemi, 2000). Everyday life symbolises just a break between climax: weekends. Monday to Friday is boring working time – nothing else is expected to happen. Friday and Saturday nights cowboys drink in small groups at home, then go out to the local disco or pub to meet friends and seek women. Sunday's agenda is, for many party-people, sleeping, football and, possibly, church attendance. Many cowboys are from religious families and live a kind of double life, being both macho drinking fisherman and Lutheran protestant with the Bible under the pillow. The machismo of the cowboys is not considered scandalous in local community, be-

cause the cowboys, as mentioned, are in general quite traditional and locally-oriented men without any ambition or wish to make a revolt in local community.

Atlantic cowboys are quite conservative culturally and detest the urban youth's 'feminine' styles and values. The cowboys believe that they are the true representatives of an authentic Faroese masculinity lost by others. The urban youth is, according to the cowboys, a weak, feminine, ridicule and unauthentic (artificial) group of men.

Some of the cowboys are explicitly anti-intellectual, disliking people with any kind of higher education or ambitions of taking higher education. Reading and studying are, according to many cowboys, non-masculine waste of time giving people strange ideas and useless visionary reflections. Reading and writing are passive non-physical activities threatening the identity, nature and virility of 'real' men. Some radical cowboys are also sexist, homophobic and racist, full of contempt and hostility towards society's minority and marginal groups. These attitudes – anchored both in a macho fisherman (and American cowboy) style and value-conservative protestant ethics – reminds of the British working-class boys presented in the sociologist Paul Willis' acclaimed book *Learning to labour* (1977). Willis' 'lads' and the Faroese cowboys do not tolerate individualist behaviour not fitting their narrow perception of boys and manliness. Many cowboys have a quite exclusive and categorical definition of 'real' men, consciously differentiating values, lifestyles and body language into contrasting male and female domains. You cannot have both or none –

there is no choice. There is only one acceptable male identity – the cowboy's.

The cowboys, greeting modern post-war consumer-culture, celebrate lifestyles based on the comfortable leisurely media-culture supporting their values and societal position. The cowboys are a product of Faroese society's developments towards a modern welfare society 1950-70, and didn't exist as category in premodern times, even if the cowboys indeed have loose cultural roots to past centuries (Gaini, 2004). In some respect the cowboys are closer to American suburban culture than to life in the Faroe Islands in the early 20th century. The cowboys dislike deep societal changes and propagate the safe, relatively isolated and non-radical family-based society. The cowboys distrust most critical intellectuals, controversial artists, and other public voices advocating alternative styles, youth cultures and masculinities in the Faroe Islands.

The cowboys are in general very satisfied with life and don't worry much about the future. Their simple way of life with family and close friends as centre of rotation seems very uncomplicated, peaceful and independent (Niemi, 2000). They do not search for alternative lifestyles or exotic cultural inspiration as they always prefer what they already know – what is safe and doesn't involve any risks or big sacrifices. Man needs his friends, family, community, house and car (and boat). Cowboys use their social capital to find a job, often manual and industrial, and are flexible and very practically minded when at work. Cowboys are, as mentioned, handymen building houses, fixing engines, slaughtering sheep, navigating

boats through strong currents on the sea and adapting easily to different situations. Cowboys have very strong ties to local community and culture, but are at the same time a product of radical societal shifts on the islands during the last turbulent decades.

Áki is living in a town in Eysturoy and has no plans of moving to any other place. He is 20 years old and lives with his parents in a nice and relatively new house with a beautiful view of the Skálafjørður. He has three younger siblings, two brothers and a sister, all living in the same house, and many relatives in the local community. Both parents are from the town, but Áki has indeed also close relatives in other parts of the Faroe Islands. His father is working on a big modern trawler and is therefore away from the family most of the time. The children don't see him very much. Áki's mother is not working. She is a housewife taking care of the small children. They children don't attend nursery school. Áki works in a fish factory in the neighboring village and has no plans of taking any higher education. He hopes to get a work on a trawler, like his father, in the near future, and his prospects are good. His father knows every man in the region and has been a member of the municipality's board for many years. Áki's mother is taken part in a local religious free church's meetings and activities every week. She has a good voice and is singing in the religious community's choir. Áki used to attend religious meetings with his mother as a boy, but during the last years he has participated in only a few religious activities. He has a car, a sporty Toyota, that he drives every night together with some close friends. They drive to the capital almost every weekend. But weekday nights they drive to neighboring villages to meet friends, buy some fast-food, rent a DVD movie, or just cruise while listening to music and talking in mobile phones. Áki is proud of his car, that he himself has fixed up as it was an old wreck

when he bought it less than a year ago. Áki has a girlfriend in another village, but they seldom drive together in his Toyota. He visits her regularly, but she is in her friends' car when she goes out. She, aged 18, is a student at upper secondary school in Eysturoy. She wants to continue her studies in Denmark next year. She is 'tired' of her small community. She thinks that the challenges and opportunities are too few in her local community. There are too few choices regarding lifestyle and working career. Áki tries to make her change her mind. He thinks that she is just trying to be like 'a foreigner' and that she should be happy to have what she already has – including him!

During the last years the cowboys have lost ground in Torshavn as the rough sexist fisherman style has lost recognition and by a growing number of young people is being associated with derogatory hillbilly and caveman stereotypes. The new times have changed the cultural trends in the Faroe Islands; personal life ambitions and educational and working career have increased considerably in value and relevancy regarding young men's identity formation and cultural capital. The fishing industry, still economically rewarding, is today associated with boring and dirty work without any interesting challenges by most teenagers. Hard physical work is not as attractive and interesting as it was earlier, as young people prefer creative mind work and modern social (leisure) lives that fishermen partly are excluded from. Labour and leisure have got a new meaning.

### **Urban (European) youth**

Urban youth, the second category of masculinity, maybe less than two thousand peo-

ple in total, embraces a broad and variegated assembly of young Faroese men. The boundary between cowboys and urban youths is indeed not unambiguous, as many people are positioned in a grey area associated to both main categories in question. The concept 'urban' is here to be carefully interpreted with reservation, as urban youth also is to be found in towns and villages, at the same time as many young men living in the urban environment – Tórshavn – do not belong to this category. Urban refers in my text to specific styles and values that might be defined as urban in character. Also, urban refers partly to global urban youth culture influence, but this is also, as I will explain, a rough simplification of a complex issue. Urban youth is the Atlantic cowboys' main opponent and the groups clash in many discussions on manliness and masculine styles.

Urban youth is always up-to-date regarding popular culture movements and styles in fashion, keeping up with the times. Young urban men, even those living in small villages, associate their lifestyles to Western big city life. They are quite individualized and untraditional regarding behaviour and style, but don't feel less anchored in Faroese culture than the cowboys or anyone else. Most young urban men spend much money on hair-dressing, trendy clothes and expensive furniture for their room or apartment. Many also practice advanced lifestyle management avoiding the risk of undesirable incongruence in taste and style, hence demonstrating control, freedom and creativity according to the standards of urban lifestyle magazines (Benwell, 2003). Fitness and attractive physical appearance

have strong value as cultural capital among urban youths (Bro and Abegg, 2002: 31; Voss, 2005: 43-44). The boys are not ashamed of using the mirror on the wall, regularly investigating their appearance critically. Controlling the body weight through healthy diet and weekly sport activities is also very common today, even if some Atlantic cowboys argue that it is directly foolish and non-masculine to adapt everyday life to the 'corrupt' aim of limiting your weight.

So-called metrosexual men (concept introduced by Mark Simpson in 1994), a widely discussed group within the urban youth category, are quite vain and narcissistic and indeed admired by both boys and girls who like these 'asexual' men's image. David Beckham, an English football star, is the most famous person associated to metrosexuality. He is, it is argued, an incarnation (or even prototype) of the curious new phenomenon called metrosexuality. Metrosexual man is provocative and controversial as he liquefies categorical representations of gender differences and flirts with styles considered homosexual and deviant (Benwell, 2003). Also, metrosexual man experiments courageously with different ethnic masculine styles, as when blond David Beckham changed hair-style and, thereafter, thousands of young men around the globe copied him: they got afro-curls (dread-locks). Urban men are in general relatively tolerant regarding people's sexual and cultural identities, not propagating any rigid masculine identity considered the only 'authentic' option. Some of the urban youths are from relatively wealthy families with private enterprises and have therefore much money at hand to

finance their expensive urban leisure life and consumption. Many young men have large networks embracing people from many places and with manifold social and cultural backgrounds, making them feel more 'cosmopolitan' and sophisticated than the 'simple' cowboys.

Urban youth is partly alternative partly mainstream, its cultural subgroups being quite varied, still all of them are more peer group-oriented than family-based, more culturally individualized than traditional local. Many young urban men are very ambitious and focused regarding their future career, investing time and resources in higher education and specialized intellectual formation. They behold pretentious visions concerning future work, leisure and family-life. Some young urban men, associated to marginal unorthodox lifestyles, are stimulated by 'post-modern' youth styles from abroad. They like to travel to unknown destinations, wear colourful hippie-clothes, listen to underground music, and don't care much about mainstream fashion and appearance. They oppose the extreme consumerism and commercial cultural globalisation characterizing contemporary western societies. They are a mosaic of urban 'villagers' composed of activists, idealists and other subcultural characters. Urban youth is in general closer linked to global trends and movements than the cowboys. Urban men are very conscious about their future and freedom (of choice), about cultural identity formation and taste, and don't care very much about common gender-difference stereotypes. Their construction of masculinity is based on trends from the media as well as reflexive personal

interpretations of these cultural models (Christensen *et al.*, 2006).

Urban youth is less (culturally) conservative than the Atlantic cowboys, still characterised by a strong group pressure to adopt and imitate trends from media and popular culture, and hence their cultural capital keeps changing character and content. Urban youths masculinity is not reflecting the men's everyday life and family background in the same degree as the cowboys' manliness do.

Many urban boys like to cook and be at home; they like to go shopping, even to iron their clothes and to participate in parent-meetings at the children's nursery or school. They fit lifestyle magazine's 'new man' concept, that presents a soft and homely man with interests in traditional 'women's issues': the home, the garden, cooking, family parties, family holidays, etcetera. This issues, I have to point out, fit better to stereotypes of relatively modern women than traditional Faroese women. It is the 'responsible' and 'honest' man in contrast to the sexist and selfish macho man with aggressive and violent behaviour (Benwell, 2003). These are, indeed, stereotypes that don't really echo the differences between cowboys and urban youths in the Faroe Islands. Many cowboys are, as mentioned, family-men that spend much time with their kin. Their unpolished behaviour and vulgar attitudes may relate to their fisherman or working-class identity, not directly to any sexist macho style.

"Preoccupations with intimacy, friendship, the meaning of life, death, love, family, belonging,

sexuality, pleasure, the body and emotions are a development of the transformations of Western societies. TV talk shows become public lessons in a newly emerging language of intimacy and ethical decision-making. What were once the private, domestic languages of women are being projected into the public arena. Men's lifestyle magazines are both a part of this trend and a reaction to it." (Rutherford, 2003: 4-5)

Urban boys are in general very interested in leisure life, cultural style, appearance and individuality, while working life and local community integration is of secondary interest. Cars are not very important (Voss, 2003). Their preferences are associated to adventure, experience and social activities.

Petur is 17 years old and lives in Torshavn. He lives with his parents and a sister, aged nine, in an old small house in the Western part of the capital. Petur lived with his family in Denmark for six years, 1990-1996, before the parents decided to move back to the Faroe Islands. It took a long time to adapt to the Faroese society after many years abroad. Petur is a student at upper secondary school and is determined to move abroad, probably to England or USA, to study economics after graduation. He has travelled a lot in Europe and North America and has friends in many countries. He likes to live in Torshavn, but is not sure that he will come back after his university studies in foreign countries, because the islands are "so small" and many people "so narrow-minded", as he says. Petur is interested in modern arts, literature and movies. He participates in numerous discussions relating to his interests on the internet. He is also a notorious internet-poker player, even if he is not very proud about it. Until now his connection to the labour market has been very limited, as he only has working experiences from two-three summer work ventures in a supermarket and a fish factory. He avoids working, if possible,

because he doesn't like it very much, and he has "other things to do...". His father is from a village in the north and Petur likes to visit his old relatives in the peaceful village. He takes many pictures when he travels in the Faroe Islands and abroad. Petur and his friends like to drink coffee while discussing all kind of subjects ranging from Eastern religion and electronic music to the quality of food and new hairstyles. Petur has painted his friends and hopes to have his own exhibiton sometime in the future. He wants to study economy to understand how money rules the world. Not, he says, too become wealthy.

The urban boys group is composed of young men with very different styles and values, their main common feature actually being the opposition to the Atlantic cowboys masculinities.

### **Lonestars**

Lonestars are in this text young men with very limited social contacts, spending most of their time at home. Young men living isolated in their media-rich rooms in apartments or family-houses is a global phenomenon, especially widespread in modern urban Japan, that wealthy modern societies, where lonestars are most common, have to take seriously. The young men are alone, but not necessarily, according to themselves, lonely. It is a deliberate isolation. The quiet and undisturbed life within the four walls is consciously chosen, but it is hopefully not planned as a permanent lifetime strategy. Many lonestars feel uncomfortable when they are in social gatherings and some are even afraid of people. They are, with varied severity, sociophobic and depressed. The lonestars have complex problems and it is a

difficult task to define this category comprehensibly.

Lonestars are not very numerous, probably a few hundred persons in the Faroe Islands, and because of their lifestyle also very invisible and peripheral, but they are interesting to study as they follow a very different path than the other masculinity categories in question. The Atlantic cowboys and urban boys have complementary female categories (some form of cowgirls and urban girls), but the lonestars don't have corresponding girl-comrades. The isolated youth phenomenon is predominantly a male issue. Very few girls, except persons with sever psychological illness, live alone in intentional isolation. "Stop the world", is the mute message of some lonestars feeling that they ride on another wave-length than the rest of the world (Loe, 2004). Lonestars are not, as often believed, lost cavemen without noteworthy practical or intellectual skills, even if their social capital and cleverness is relatively weak. Lonestars are often introverted, but not necessarily navel-gazing and unreflecting persons, as many of them use modern digital media to get detailed information on important societal developments and changes. They might even be experts in restricted specialized fields of knowledge. Lonestars are hence often potential masters of arts, technology or science in absentia. They know what the others do, but nobody knows what they are doing.

Lonestars believe that they are as masculine as anyone else; some even claim to represent fierce male resistance against a disintegrating and alienating society's 'feminisation' process in progress. Others, con-

trarily, claim that frustrating old-fashioned masculine ideals, forcing suppressive male homogeneity into effect, are hindering them to live free lives and boycott this brutal regime by voluntary resignation. They feel stigmatised and powerless, a negative process that accelerates when lonestars lose their position in the labour market, educational institutions and among peers, ending isolated without economic revenues or vital social networks. Lonestars are mute men dependent on relatives' charity. Is the lonestar's choice a flop or success? The answer depends on the person who is asked. Does he feel as a loser, a martyr or a winner? Lonestars are, as mentioned, often brilliant capacities within narrow fields of knowledge that are handicapped by fear and sociophobia, making many men to seek extreme security as strategy.

The Faroe Islands are small and considered family-based, making complete isolation, which is a real possibility in Tokyo and other large cities, almost impossible for any individual. Lonestars in the Faroe Islands usually stay at their parents home, a safe and peaceful place, where they have access to all modern facilities. In this respect it looks like a pleasant and carefree life without stressing and back-breaking competition. Lonestars, also Japanese, staying at their parents home, have at least contact to a few people living in or frequenting the home. Real tragedy could emerge if the lonestar was thrown out of the house, his secure structured universe thereby disappearing. Staying alone in a room with television, radio and a computer with internet access is not a problem *per se* for lonestars, but lack of

recognition and contact to girls is a big and, for most men, painful sacrifice.

Óli is around 24 years old and lives with his mother in a big house in Torshavn. He has two brothers, one living in Denmark and the other in a basement flat in the mother's house. Óli's father died approximately 12 years ago. Óli has always lived in this house and was for many years almost never outside the house. His whole world was inside the four walls of the house. His mother took care of the shopping, cooking, washing, and all other practicalities, while Óli slept, read books, watched television, listened to music, played games on the internet, and talked to the relatives and friends visiting Óli and, mostly, his mother. Óli's life has changed very much the last two years. With the help of his concerned brother he started to go out and today he has a full-time job in a shop. Óli was very isolated and quite depressed for many years, a situation related to the tragic death of his father while Óli was still a child, and didn't care much about any social activities or experiences. He was afraid and searched peace and safety. Night or day made no difference, weekend was an absurd concept, and the television was always turned on. He had no energy to engage in any project and looked quite untidy and absent-minded. His room was a big mess and always very dark – hidden behind tick carpets. His mother treated him like a baby and didn't make any effort to induce or force Óli to get out of the house. She wanted to protect him, take care of her 'poor' boy, and didn't want any psychologist or any other stranger to talk to Óli. But everything changed when he started to attend evening school courses with his brother. He got a new life, even if his social network is very limited and he doesn't spend evenings in cafés or bars. He relaxes in the sofa at home after long working days with new experiences every day...

In small-scale societies, like the Faroese, it

is practically impossible to live completely anonymously, and lonestars cannot change identity – become Atlantic cowboys or urban youth – without patience and big efforts. Lonestars can only be invisible at home, because as soon as they go out and enter any social gathering they get categorized and even stigmatised. For some lonestars it is easier to get life success if they take a big step and move out of the country, to a completely new environment, and get a fresh start with *tabula rasa*, than to try to integrate into local society.

### **Glocal pragmatics**

Pragmatic young men are persons that move, easily and unimpeded, between the main groups – Atlantic cowboys and urban youth – according to personal strategies, even if they find it difficult to take the old-style macho-values of the cowboys seriously. They are flexible and practical men taking advantage of both groups depending on the context in question. Pragmatics should not be interchanged with persons positioned in the grey border zone between cowboys and urban youths. Pragmatic boys are not mixing groups, neither dissolving borders, because they are negotiators or *bricoleurs* dependent on both groups and their bipolar contrasts in order to enhance personal social status and reputation. They are clever postmodern opportunists without substantial ideologies to define their masculine identities. Some pragmatics are cultural chameleons avoiding threatening opponents through strategic harmless ‘outsider’ positions. Many pragmatics are foreigners

living in the Faroe Islands, but also Faroese men returning home after years in exile are to be found in the category. Glocal pragmatics are often persons in an unusual transitional phase of life – changing job, religion, residence, friends, etcetera – that emancipate them temporarily from strong social and family ties. Pragmatics might be foreign exchange students staying in the country for a year or less. Faroese pragmatics are very often career-oriented adventurers establishing untraditional alliances in their business ventures. They are spiders with invisible ever-changing social web systems.

Pragmatics are solution-oriented career-minded people, often very independent, self-confident and economically well-off, that combine local and global cultural identities and build bridges in Faroese society. Some of the pragmatics are aggressive materialists smelling money at long distance. The concept ‘bricoleur’, as Lévi-Strauss defines it, fits very well to the pragmatics, as they have the necessary cultural capital and practical skills enabling them to move around in society and even trigger deep societal changes. They are entrepreneurs with success in periods of societal growth and failure in depressions. Their curriculum is a roller-coaster. Their strength is, so to say, also their weak point. They are flexible, still very sensible. Pragmatics are in general progressive key-players in the formal and informal decision-making processes in society. The border region between the urban youth and pragmatics is quite fluid as many young people could be placed into both categories. Young academics, people with

higher education from Denmark and other countries, returning home after many years in foreign urban environments to make career in the Faroe Islands, a small society in transition, fit best to these categories. The pragmatics are those with highest visions and political cleverness, while the urban youths in general are more anonymous and 'conventional'.

The booming IT business is an interesting new economic sector with growing prominence, embracing men (and women) from most youth cultures in society. The IT business embraces cowboys, urban youth, pragmatics – even former lonestars. Some of the private computer engineering enterprises are run almost like traditional Faroese fishing vessels: strong masculine dominance (influencing the language and behaviour), a high degree of informal symbolic communication and networking, hierarchical structures, ruthless individual competition, etcetera. Pragmatics are not seldom creative inventors developing new products for new markets in IT and other latemodern businesses. Cowboys and urban youth are assisting the pragmatics in different working tasks. If a venture turns out to be unprofitable the pragmatics immediately start on a new business venture with new name and new partners. They erase their traces, change locality, and find new potential investors. They don't have any deep attachment or loyalty to local community.

Ingi is adopted from Asia but has lived in the Faroe Islands since he was about five years old. Before arrival to Torshavn he lived in Denmark for 2-3 years with his sister (also adopted) and Faroese parents. Ingi is today 35 years old and

has established his own family. He has a wife and two children. He loves to live in the Faroe Islands and wouldn't dream of moving to any other place. He likes to spend summer holidays in Denmark, like his parents did every year while Ingi was a child, but he shows no interest in travelling to other places... He spends most of his free time at home with his family. He is very happy and proud of what he has obtained in life: he has a good job, a family, a nice house, a big car, and all the electronic equipments (televisions, computers, stereo music systems, mobile phones, DVD-players, etcetera) that he is a big 'fan' and consumer of. He has a large social network, embracing people from many religious, social and cultural backgrounds in the Faroe Islands. He is a person that easily can speak to anyone he meets, that shows strong self-confidence, and that is quite egocentric, always calculating the maximum benefits he can get from any social interaction or venture. He is very conscious of his background, of his merits and failures, and always wants to be in total control of his own life. Ingi has, before he got married a few years ago, experiences from many different manual jobs and has had many different friends from manifold cultural environments. He has always been a kind of insider and outsider at the same time wherever he has been – flexible when in a new context, but also always ready to leave and change path of life. He feels best at home. His strong social capital, based on charm, good humour and the art of 'promoting' yourself, has helped him getting where he is today, as well as, not to forget, the economic security that his caring parents gave him as a young man. He always had money in his pocket, even if he used a lot of money on entertainment and luxury goods. He is an opportunistic survivor knowing how to become friend of the strongest and is considered as a loyal mate to many groups with different values and styles in society. He has, consciously, never put himself clearly into any caging category.

Pragmatic men would never define themselves as a group or category. They prefer to be outsiders working inside.

### Conclusions

Faroese youths live in an advanced, open and media-rich society that – even if we call it latemodern – is in a fragile transitional phase with contesting interests, values and attitudes in loud public discourse clashes. Even if the youth is well-adapted to the challenges and opportunities of the new era, there are indeed groups in Faroese society distrusting and resisting globalisation processes guiding changes in society and culture.

The Faroe Islands are too small to embrace elaborated and demarcated youth cultures, even if most styles and symbols are present in society. Young people's family bonds and social networks are crossing sub-cultural boundaries so that young people often have connection and affiliation to several youth groups. Religion is also an important factor justifying values and lifestyles of teenagers. Young people actively engaged in free churches often make their own groups relatively isolated from others. Socially marginalized youth is also often organized as a separate youth group with limited interaction with other youth groups outside school.

Leisure is considered as an important capital in the life of people in latemodern society, and working and family life are supposed to fit into the leisure life; leisure activities are – if avoidable – not sacrificed because of possible working conditions. Many young people choose working careers directly linked to their youth leisure life.

Leisure is today even treated as some kind of learning arena and education, much prized by latemodern society that also gives formal education a very high priority. Learning is going on everywhere, e.g. in relation to new computer technologies where the children are more advanced than their teachers. This was unthinkable only a few years ago.

Tradition is an important capital in most contemporary youth cultures. It is often argued that cities are modern and global while villages (the periphery) are traditional and local. This might sound plausible but is rejected in many inquiries. "Villages are", says Fornäs, "also modern – it is a myth to think that they are a premodern reserve. New media have influenced life in rural areas as much as in big cities" (1994: 56, my translation). Geographical distance and urban-rural contrasts do not in themselves explain what the modern life of young people and adults is like, even if the information might give a vague idea of the situation. In high modernity, says Giddens (1991), remote events influenced by near-by events or the intimacy of self become more and more common. The situation is much more complex than often portrayed, because local and global, traditional and modern are in interplay and the flow of influence is going in both directions.

The four categories described above have interesting differences and similarities, but the groups' internal variation is, as demonstrated, significant. The groups of men are indeed mutually interdependent as analytical categories, as the definitions are based on structural contrasts as in most other

anthropological identity definitions – e.g. ethnic and national. Self-identity is based on recognition and ascribed identification. This is very clear regarding the main groups: Atlantic cowboys and urban (European) youth; they fight a symbolic cultural power struggle stressing differences “that make a difference” (Bateson, 1973). Even if the names ‘cowboys’ and ‘urban youth’ give strong associations to specific types of men I have not concentrated on extreme male identities and masculinities – e.g. hypermasculinity (Jensen, 2005). The categories in this text accommodate several subcultures. All categories involve rural and urban regions, local and global cultural influence, traditional and (late)modern society, sexist and tolerant attitudes, even if the patterns regarding these positions varies markedly depending on the masculinity category in focus.

Cowboys are neither premodern nor late-modern; they connect different eras unconsciously but have in general limited interest in history and folklore, as they are neither traditionalists nor intellectual cosmopolitans. They are provincial pragmatic working-class men waiting for holidays to bring action and adventure into life, thereafter happily returning to the conventional and safe order of life.

Urban youth is the most expanding group of men in the Faroe Islands. They are dominant among teenagers anno 2006 as their lifestyles have gained strong recognition and popularity through media in general and growing global influence on Faroese youth in particular. The proud Atlantic cowboys are becoming older and more peripheral, even if they still are very noisy in the pub-

lic discourse. The choice of music in public radio emissions is a good exemplification of this fact. These days the cowboys experience a severe power backlash as the fishing industry and manual work in general have become less attractive regarding future career preferences among young people. The cowboys are slowly becoming marginalized and squeezed out of the urban elite. Also, their widespread lack of formal education, which didn't cause any noteworthy career problems earlier, is now handicapping the cowboys in their efforts to keep on the track. As diplomas from recognized education institutions become the prime factor defining a man's value as manpower, ergo your destiny in the labour market, the local social networks and family capital fail to secure the Atlantic cowboy a glorious position in society. Their local capital is, so to say, overrun by national and global competition grounded on new formal standards. This development, producing new forms of social marginalisation, has strong parallels in rural areas in many other countries around the globe.

[A] focus on the concept of unmanliness allows for a deeper understanding of the emotional and personal costs that specific male ideals can cause individuals or groups of men. A man can never be sure of his masculinity, but must constantly prove his gendered value in order to be affirmed, both as a human being and a man by the surrounding world. The fear of being demasculinised and thus regarded as unworthy of the label ‘real man’ is something that is implanted in men from an early age [...] The fear of failing into unmanliness is thus present as a constantly accompanying shadow and as a hidden driving force underlying men's objective

of upholding their male identity... (Ekenstam, 2005: 31)

Masculinities are changing and reflecting the social and cultural developments in Faroese society. The cultural capital securing prosperity and life success changes character. The four categories presented and analysed in this article could have been divided into several other independent categories, they are of course not 'natural' or eternal, but they illuminate the main social processes that the Faroe Islands, a society in transition, are piloted by. Once were men, gone now and substituted by several variations of the same men, influenced by manifold values and ideals from local society and global media. The stereotypes of gender differences, propagated through popular media, construct a masculinity that only a few men recognize. This article enlightens the masculinity debate from another angle.

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